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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Roanoke City takes on mitigation project

Over the years, repeated flooding has disrupted the lives of the citizens and businesses in the Garden City neighborhood of Roanoke City. Built along the bottoms of steep mountain slopes, over 80 of the community's 1,000 homes are located in the floodplain.

The final blow came during the 1995 June flood. The IFLOWS system for that area recorded four inches of rainfall in just over an hour, which contrasted sharply with the two inches the rest of the city received. The force of water rushing down steep mountainsides swept away cars and buildings in its path.

The city has been striving over the last year to permanently end this destructive cycle of repeated flooding. In the largest acquisition project ever attempted in Virginia, Roanoke is working through the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to purchase 42 flood-prone structures in the community and relocate the residents to safer sites. This past November, FEMA approved a grant to Roanoke that provides 75 percent of the total cost of the project, or about \$1,900,000, with the city and state covering the remaining 25 percent. Citizen participation in the project is completely voluntary and the land acquired will be deeded to the city and converted to public parks.

"This is the first time that a property acquisition project has been implemented under FEMA in the state of Virginia," said Hazard Mitigation Branch Chief, Mary Camp. "As we discover where these floods repetitively occur, more and more the solution is to persuade residents in these areas to move voluntarily out of the floodplain. This is often the better solution because it's a more cost-effective way to protect people from flooding than constructing berms or other types of

flood barriers."

Greg Reed, city civil engineer, has been actively involved with the project. "We are just now putting together our buyout



policy," he said. "We plan to use an independent appraiser and offer market value for these homes." Reed described the city's efforts to gain the cooperation of the community's citizens. After last year's flooding, Reed sent out a questionnaire to community residents, designed to get their feedback on the project.

A citizen's task force was formed, composed of members from the community, the Director of Public Works and its engineering staff, emergency services and FEMA representatives. The task force met frequently with the community, working on issues involving relocating renters, ensuring that the special needs of elderly residents would be met and other topics. "I think we're looking at a year to two years for this project to be completed," said Reed. "We are making a real effort to keep the community involved."

Other projects under the grant program involving buyouts, elevating or moving houses are being planned for the towns of Vinton and Glasgow, the cities of Lexington and Buena Vista, and the counties of Shenandoah, Madison, Page and Warren.

"Mitigation is the most important of the phases in emergency management," said Emergency Services Coordinator Wanda Reed. "The benefits of this project will directly impact emergency response. The risk to citizens and emergency responders

will be reduced and we will save in response, not only at the local level, but at the state and federal level as well. The important thing is that the community worked together on this project. If you involve the citizens up front in decision making, they will often come up with better solutions."

West appointed Public Safety Secretary

Hanover County native, Patricia L. West, was appointed by Governor George Allen as Secretary of Public Safety in early December. West has served as Director of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice since her appointment by Governor Allen in May of 1994.

She is a former Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney for the city of Norfolk and a former Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney for the city of Virginia Beach. During her tenure, West specialized in prosecuting juvenile felony cases.

She received her undergraduate and law degrees from The College of William and Mary. West oversees 11 state agencies responsible for public safety, including VDES.

"The Virginia Department of Emergency Services is an integral part of the Public Safety Secretariat. Time and time again, VDES has proven to be an invaluable resource to our citizens during times of disaster, and they are to be commended for their efforts," said West.

A new "VOIS" is added to emergency response

While many of Virginia's localities were still reeling from Hurricane Fran's pounding, a new weapon was being deployed at the state level. Called the Virginia Operational Information System (VOIS), it enabled state agencies to share valuable crisis management information in real time. Most noteworthy, the system used existing hardware and software, which made it a cost-effective investment.

The system was developed by VDOT, the State Police and VDES. It is an interagency emergency communications network that uses the EIS/InfoBook software. A key advantage is that the user can log an array of information into the EIS/InfoBook, which can be shared almost immedi-

ately through the network.

"The network allows real-time coordination of resources and actions," said VDOT Emergency Operations Director, Steve Mondul. "For example, during Hurricane Fran, VDOT deployed 'Tiger' teams to the most severely affected areas around the state. The teams input road clearing and road repair information into the network which was then accessed by the State EOC and passed down to the localities. The network speeds up the information loop."

Currently the system is being used by VDOT, VDES and the State Police. This coalition of state agencies has formed a committee, the VOIS Users' Group, that pools resources and expertise. The committee is working to

eliminate bugs in the system and plans to connect the Departments of Aviation, Forestry, Corrections and Health to the network. Members are also discussing the most effective way to bring the system to localities.

"With so many different agencies involved in emergency response, a key advantage of the network is that information can be shared between the participating agencies," said Brian Chodrow, VOIS committee chairman. "The system reduces the number of phone calls and the shared platform eliminates redundancies."

Virginia's system parallels efforts by FEMA to develop a National Emergency Management Information System (NEMIS) at the federal level.

NEMIS will use EIS InfoBook software and will be Internet-capable. When the project is completed, FEMA plans to implement NEMIS in about 1,800 locations in all 50 states.

"Our philosophy is information is not proprietary," said George Foresman, VDES assistant state coordinator. "At the state level, we are looking at how we can collectively use all of our resources to share information. This network gives us faster access to more information, and more accurate information, which we can use to support local government. Ultimately, this means a higher level of customer service."

To offer ideas, call Brian Chodrow at 804/674-2095. For information on VOIS, call George Foresman at 804/674-2458.

Get ready to manage stress

by Walter G. Green III, CEM

Last year, Virginia's emergency services worked a record number of presidentially-declared disasters. These events, along with the daily workload of numerous other minor and major emergencies, guaranteed long, grueling hours for a lot of people. As the recovery process in Hurricane Fran's aftermath continues, take a moment to note these tips for dealing with stress.

Emergency managers are managers with a difference. We supervise programs, but not many people. This changes when your EOC fills with people doing unfamiliar tasks in unusual settings during the unthinkable disaster. They look to you for leadership in getting through the event which causes instant stress on both sides of the table!

You can take steps to reduce their stress and yours. Before the big one hits, consider the following:

☐ Provide for your people all the

training you can — knowledge reduces stress.

☐ Build familiarity with the response process. Participate in every exercise you can and involve as many of your team members as possible.



☐ Make your EOC "user-friendly." A bright paint job does wonders for morale. If possible, provide adequate work space (three feet by four feet minimum). Swivel chairs that rock make a huge difference.

☐ Train the families of your staff in basic disaster preparedness. They need to know what to do and where to go. Plan for their sheltering and support.

When you get clobbered, ensure that

procedures are in place to keep your staff working at the best possible level.

☐ Enforce noise and clutter discipline, if possible. Keeping the noise down helps reduce fatigue and organized work areas reduce visual distractions.

☐ Keep shifts short. Initially, you'll have to work 12 or more hours, but don't keep this up. Go to eight-hour shifts as soon as possible. Bring in your second and third teams.

☐ Keep meals on a regular schedule. Make them nutritious — avoid junk foods and foods with a high fat content.

☐ Make people take breaks. At least 10-15 minutes every hour or hour and a half must be spent outside and away.

These suggestions are not easily accomplished. During a disaster response, we all have budget and work priorities that seem to be more important to us. However, if we don't take care of stress and fatigue when we can, we will be less able to make appropriate decisions and our citizens will suffer.

HAZ MAT



Visionary leadership key to facing future challenges in Hazmat

by Willie Howlett, VDES Hazardous Materials Field Manager

How old is the Hazardous Materials Program in Virginia? How did it begin? Why has it become so successful? Where is it headed? These are only a few of the questions I have been asked this past year.

Perhaps what is more interesting than the questions themselves, are the people who are asking them. Officials from other state hazmat programs, from the federal government, and even from governments in other countries have expressed interest in Virginia's hazmat program. The Commonwealth can be proud that our state and local programs have inspired such widespread interest.

House Bill 1172, passed by the General Assembly in 1987, marked the official beginnings of the Virginia Hazardous Materials Program as we know it today. This legislation charged VDES with developing, implementing and administering the program. Working with several local government hazmat teams already in existence, VDES staff set into motion unprecedented efforts to respond to this legislative challenge. With a modest budget, extremely limited staff and more commitment than a herd of elephants could pull, they began building

the program.

In ten short years, it grew from a wonderful idea to what some have called an 'overnight success.' Today Regional Response Teams and Hazardous Materials Officers are



well-trained and equipped with state-of-the-art technology. This premier, state-wide hazmat program ensures the safety of our citizens will be protected.

As the agency and localities face tough issues such as the threat of terrorism, environmental crimes, expanded responsibilities and ever-increasing budget challenges, the future raises more questions and brings tremendous responsibilities. How will we address these issues in the coming year?

While we may not yet have specific answers, we can be sure of one fact. Dedicated professionals at the state and local level will continue to enhance existing programs, while providing visionary leadership that displays the comprehensive, integrated and systematic approach which has proven so successful. The synergistic capabilities of everyone working in the hazmat program in Virginia illustrates this every day.

Regional Coordinator receives recognition

During NCCEM's annual conference last October, VDES Regional Coordinator Curt Nellis was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation for his dedicated service as chairman of the Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) Commission. Nellis has been an actively involved member of the commission from its beginnings in 1990. He was appointed chairman last year and will serve again this coming year.

"The twenty-member commission reflects the nationwide base of the NCCEM membership," said Nellis. "When an applicant is accepted by the commission, this person has demonstrated that he or she has the knowledge, skills and abilities, as envisioned by the commission, to be a CEM."

Last year, Nellis said, one of the commission's goals was to design a recertification process for the CEM which is now being implemented.

The group is taking on a challenging task for the coming year. "We now require the candidate have a degree to

receive a CEM," said Nellis. "The NCCEM Board of Directors recently charged the CEM Commission to enhance its program by recognizing a broader range of life experience and credentials when evaluating candidates. The commission will work to develop a system to meet this request, while at the same time, ensuring that the credibility of the CEM is not tarnished. This does not imply elimination of the CEM educational requirements, however."

Nellis pointed out the value of the CEM in the career development of an emergency manager. "In the past, emergency management was not always recognized by local government. The CEM program developed the standards that helped pull the profession out of the basement. It's important for emergency managers to pursue that accreditation — to emphasize that emergency management is an important part of local government and that their emergency manager is credentialed to do the job."

Newsletter wins award

Last year brought recognition to the VDES *Emergency Management Update* publication. At NCCEM's 1996 annual conference, the newsletter placed first in the state-level newsletters category in the Media Awards Contest. Other awards included first place in the Special Publications category for the VDES *Flood Recovery Bulletin* and third place in the same category for the *Special Edition: The Flood of 1995*.

This recognition would not have been possible without the support of the local emergency services community and the agency. The editors wish to thank everyone who gave time and shared experiences for newsletter articles. As always, your ideas, suggestions and contributions are welcome.

TRAINING



Public Policy in Emergency Management

The January 29 class scheduled to be held in Richmond has been cancelled.

ICS/EOC Interface

February 5-6
Culpeper

Emergency Preparedness Community Outreach

February 7
Newport News

Technological Hazards Division Hazardous Materials Incident Management

February 7-9
Location to be announced
For information, call the VDES Tech Haz Division at 804/674-2510

Search and Rescue

SAR Council
January 25
Richmond

GSAR Institute, Parts I and II

January 17-19
February 14-16
Camp VA Jaycee

Managing Search Operations

February 8-9
February 22-23
Charlottesville
For information, call Winnie Pennington at 804/674-2422

Conferences and Workshops

VEMA Annual Conference
March 5-7
Virginia Beach
For information, call 540/582-7095

Catalog geared to children

When educating children about the weather, make the learning experience memorable and turn to The Weather Channel's catalog of educational products. It offers "Hurricane: Season on Edge," a video and teacher's guide about hurricanes. Lesson ideas encourage children to discuss



how communities prepare for major storms and rebuild in the aftermath.

A variety of books and videos explain various weather phenomena and terminology. Many of the books contain three dimensional graphics and charts or interactive projects that help simplify complex concepts. The "Everything Weather" CD ROM offers a multimedia weather learning experience. To order the catalog, call 800/294-8219.

Networking corner

Now is the chance to shine a spotlight on the extraordinary achievements of children during disasters. FEMA is providing stories about children's heroism to a television producer for a major network. If you have a story you would like to contribute, call Janet Clements at 804/674-2499 or email at jclements.des@state.va.us. Any accounts should include the basic story, the identity of the individuals involved and the location.

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Lend a helping hand to your peers in other states. King County, Washington, is planning a new Emergency Operations Center. They would like to glean ideas from localities that have either built a new EOC or updated an old one. Of particular interest to them are combination centers that include communications and emergency operations functions. Call Diane Newman at 206/296-3830 to share your experiences or email at diane.newman@metrokc.gov

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Remember the Package Disaster Hospitals used in the 1960s? Emergency Services Director for Athens-Limestone County in Alabama, Spencer Black, works for a missionary group that sends these hospitals to countries overseas. Call Spencer Black at 205/232-2631 if you know where unused ones might be found, or email at ema2@companet.net

Witt agrees to stay

After a meeting with President Bill Clinton in November, James Lee Witt agreed to continue as FEMA's director during the administration's second term. As he did during his first four years, Witt emphasized partnership and cooperation. He stated, "As I look to the future, I see opportunities to enhance our operations, to reduce costs and be more effective, to improve on our partnerships with state and local governments and to initiate new partnerships with the private sector."



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Access the VDES homepage at:
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